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W. G. LEE, DOMINATING LEADER OF RAILROAD MEN

Character Analysis of Man Who Did Much to Avert Strike

Little Known to the General Public, His Fame Is Wide Among Rail Workers, Where His Invincible Courage Is Respected and His High Aims for His Men Have Gained Their Love

BACK of the settlement of the threatened railroad strike and beyond the general knowledge of the public was the personality of one man—William Granville Lee, head of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. How Lee—"W. G." is his nickname among his fellow workers—has risen from brakeman to such a commanding position in the railroad world is one of the romances of the great steel highways. Of extraordinary personality and ability, his work of organization is only one small part of his character. A wider knowledge of the public and its attitude that savors almost of statesmanship often has been shown by him. An unflinching desire to do right by his fellows, by the roads and by the people at large has been his thought in disputes of the past.

That the public may see the man as he is and as he is known to those closest to him is the object of the character study presented here to-day.

ASAYING quoted from William Granville Lee, who as head of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen is particularly interesting at this moment just following all the talk of a big strike and its shift into the background, if not the discard, may throw a ray on the man. He is said to have said this: "Physically all you do won't make a young man out of an old one, but a man's mind need never grow old."

Mr. Lee himself is not a young man; he was born in 1859, but as his friends who wish to flatter him—even a strike magnate is susceptible to flattery—say he hasn't "changed a hair in twenty years." While the man is younger in appearance than his acknowledged years, his hair is white and there isn't so much of it as when he used to be conductor on the Atchison and Santa Fe, and there are other marks of unflattering time.

Time Has Softened Former Aggressiveness

Chief of these is the change in his expression. Aggressiveness was strongly marked in his face when he was elected a good many years ago to be vice-president of his brotherhood. This trait had faded by several degrees when, after fourteen years of filling that office, he was elected to succeed the late "Pat" Morrissey as president. Experience of the leadership of men and contact with leaders opposed to him whose mentality cannot be underrated, has apparently taught this leader that there are better ways of getting things done than by going after them in bulldog fashion.

Indeed, so to heart has this particular labor man taken his lesson that he is now considered as the most conservative of the great railway four, the others of which are Carter, Stone and Sheppard.

This amelioration of demeanor is not, however, confined to Mr. Lee; it is general. Labor leaders of to-day are not exteriorly what they were ten years ago. Gone are the times when simply to be forceful was sufficient, and no present day leader now puts a big cigar in the corner of his mouth and rests his feet on the table.

No, conferences between these magnates and the railway presidents are polite functions. Harsh words are never exchanged. But in this modern amenity of behavior it is not likely that any force or strategy is lost.

Educated in Public Schools In Natal State, Illinois

The president of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen, educated in the public schools of his native State, Illinois, brakeman and then conductor, is about to have a birthday. Just to show that it is not all pleasure to occupy such a position but that besides the anxieties it entails the place calls for many minor sacrifices, the indication is that Mr. Lee will not be able to celebrate his natal anniversary at his present home in Cleveland, Ohio. These men, indeed, have not a great deal of home life. This man in particular is here and there and everywhere about the country the year through. His home, although he may not admit it, is in the hotel room where he hangs up his hat. In this city that hotel room is commonly one in the Hotel Belmont.

The year 1920-21, culminating in the recent crisis, has been a severe strain on the president of the trainmen, and physically he has been less able to bear it than usual; an infection on the cheek developed pain-

William Granville Lee, head of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen and a dominant figure in the highly skilled transportation unions.



he learned his knowledge of the world and of the men in it, he did learn it thoroughly and he applies his knowledge with tact and discretion.

"It's a hard grind he and his fellow brotherhood presidents are up against, their work is never ending, and whenever they least expect it circumstances present new obstacles. At the moment there is a lull, but how long this will endure who can predict?" This was said by a man familiar with capital and labor who had been asked to give his estimate of Mr. Lee. It is a high one. He believes Mr. Lee has just the right kind of force and wisdom that these critical times require.

"In the railway fight," this observer continued, "people have dropped from view certain important things. They fancy for instance that when this country went into the war the present increase in wages was tendered to the men on a kind of salver. That isn't true. The leaders had to fight and fight hard for what they got."

"Well, they got their increase. Now the men don't want their wages reduced. Who would? I have heard Mr. Lee give his views on this question and they are certainly sane and reasonable."

Another Clash in Sight Over Labor Board's Power

"The last time I heard him talk in public was against the Canadian compulsory industrial act. He was quietly forceful and spoke in a way to carry conviction to unprejudiced minds. The same force of argument may be expected from him when the real issue shall be joined between the brotherhoods and the labor board. This is the demand of the labor board to be given power to enforce its decisions."

"That involves another point on which the public is badly informed. The labor board cannot by law compel the railroad men to do anything. When this board said that the recent threat of a strike or the strike if called was in violation of the orders of itself the railroad brotherhoods might have replied: 'Go to hell.'"

"They didn't so reply, and I think their restraint was primarily due to Lee's long

headedness. He is aware that the public must be taught that the law does not provide compulsory powers to the board's decisions."

"The present status of the affair is this: No more offers, suggestions or what not will be made by the brotherhoods, who prefer to begin a course of public education. The offers, suggestions, &c., must come from the railway managers."

"These gentlemen have already made it. They ask for a 10 per cent. reduction in wages under a ruling of the labor board. Conferences must be had with the men of each road to take up this question. If they can't agree and the railroad managers will not back down then the fight will be resumed."

"But Lee and his fellows know how powerful an agent is time. Conditions may get better, the railway business may pick up and the reasons for a fight may dwindle away. In the meantime they counsel the educative process I have referred to as being undertaken."

Nearly All Are Americans In the Railway Unions

Mr. Lee and the presidents of the other railway brotherhoods consider that they possess an element of strength in the complexion of the organizations. Nearly all the railroad men are Americans. Although there exists no positive bar to foreigners, yet the foreign element in the organizations is almost negligible it is so small. There are no Italian brakemen and no Poles, or exiles from the Balkans. So when an appeal is made by railroad labor to the country the leaders say it is from brother to brother.

The salary of William Granville Lee is not a large one—it is \$10,000 a year—considering the anxious work he has to do and the fact that he is on the rack most of the time. In his incumbency of the presidency of his brotherhood he has, it is said, been responsible for many changes which have strengthened it all along the line.

It is now in a position to put up a

Educated in Public Schools of His Natal State. Illinois, He Served as Brakeman and Conductor in the West, but for Nearly Thirty Years He Has Labored for His Fellows

strong, possibly a winning fight. But in the president's opinion the time is not now and the policy is to be one of watchful waiting for the psychological moment. Therefore on with the quiet and pervasive propaganda.

A word more about the man himself. He has no relaxations, no games, reads temperately and avoids fiction. Only occasionally he goes to the theatre, but he likes the movies. He is a lover of art in any form, like architecture, and he cares for good pictures also. But acting, dancing and kindred exhibitions leave him cold.

Much of his strength with the trainmen grows out of his intimate knowledge of their lives and toils. He has been through all the experiences they are likely to have and he sympathizes with them in their very natural ambitions. From every standpoint he can view their aspirations and visualize their needs. Having like ambitions and aspirations, he can weigh theirs, accept what is reasonable and possible and discard what seems too far-fetched.

Lee is an American, and perhaps that says all. But to go on by negations it may be added that he is anti-socialist, anti-bolshevist and anti almost every subversive theory. He does not wish to subvert any existing law of government, but instead to make the present laws better understood than they are and in this way to render men generally happier because they know when they are well off.

As a very real admirer of the leader put it: "Mr. Lee lives to work for all his men."

To pass from this inadequate description of who W. G. Lee is to what he has done is to go from the partly imaginative or fanciful—for who can say the whole truth about any man?—to the positive real. He assumed the duties of president of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen January 1, 1909, after fourteen years as a subordinate officer.

There were misgivings in the organization at the time of his election, for although all that he had done had benefited the cause Mr. Lee is not the type that makes a good subordinate. Thus men who had watched him through several petty differences doubted his strength of self-control.

Broader Business Training Than the Mere Railroad Man

They were mistaken, of course, for the very traits that they had found fault with when they were criticizing the vice-presidents became present virtues when he had a free hand. His business training had been somewhat wider than comes naturally to a railroad man, for in 1883 he broadened it by accepting the position of deputy registrar of deeds for Ford county, Kansas, and he served in that capacity for three and one-half years.

Then he reentered railway service as brakeman and switchman with the Wabash Railway, but after a few months' service he quit and went as brakeman with the Missouri Pacific. In 1891 he accepted service with the Union Pacific and five months later was promoted to conductor. Lee held this position at the time of his election to the office of first vice-grand master of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen. This was in August, 1895.

Lee's service on the mountain railways was performed under peculiarly trying conditions. At that time railroading was comparatively new in the mountains; air brakes, automatic couplers and other safety devices now in effect were unknown. The mountains, too, were filled with lawless, irresponsible men and the terminals where railway employees were forced to live were comfortless and bare. The towns were new, most of the inhabitants still lived in tents, and gambling houses and saloons were numerous and popular.

Leader at Once On Joining Brotherhood

At this time, too, it was necessary that one member of a train crew should have some knowledge of telegraphy. Fortunately Lee had learned the Morse code and this knowledge served its good purpose in securing for him early promotion. During the time that he was employed on the Raton Mountain, between Trinidad and Raton, this acquirement served him well and the company also. It was on this route that he unloaded the first consignments of steel used in the bridges that were being constructed to take the places of old wooden structures that spanned the mountain streams. Mr. Lee's railroad experience thus will be seen to have included every class of employment in train and yard service.

Early in 1889 Mr. Lee joined the Brotherhood of Railroad Brakemen and he soon became prominent in its affairs in his

neighborhood. He was a member of the committee that put into effect the first working agreement for conductors, brakemen and yardmen on the Missouri Pacific. In 1906 the first collective movement for train and yardmen for employees in the Western territory was inaugurated. Lee was then assistant to the Grand Master and much of the details of that office was under his personal direction. He succeeded in obtaining increased wages for the men in that section.

In the same year he was charged with the Pittsburgh movement, which included all the lines entering that city and his efforts resulted in better service conditions and increased pay for the yardmen.

Does Much for His Men In Advancing Wages

Since assuming the duties of President of the brotherhood Lee has conducted wage movements in the Eastern, Western and Southern territories which have resulted in material advantages to the men. Under his direct supervision the trainmen number more than 30,000, while it is said there are more than \$2,450,000 in its funds, far exceeding its capital when he assumed the presidency.

Common sense has dictated his policy from the outset and the conditions which led him to think the public at the present time would in a measure approve a strike of the associated railroad brotherhoods were judged by this standard. The Government, he averred, has disappointed the trainmen in its promises of last summer to bring down the price of living commodities so that the men could meet them with their wages.

In his statement regarding the recent proposed strike Mr. Lee declared in October that the men voted to strike over his head. Shortly after taking the pulse of the country on the strike he stated that in his opinion to walk out now "would be insane." These are the recent evidences of Mr. Lee's possession of the admirable quality of common sense.

How He Handled An "Outlaw" Strike

His attitude in connection with what he denominated an "illegal strike" is further proof of the force of the man. First of the brotherhood presidents he signed the letter condemning the promotion of illegal strikes as efforts to destroy the existing brotherhoods. In this connection he wrote:

"The loyal membership of these organizations should remember that these organizations continue to live and to prosper not as a result of the assistance and good wishes of those expelled for engaging in the illegal strike but over the protest of such individuals."

"The illegal strike of members and others since April, 1920, on railroads where these organizations maintain schedules or working agreements was started by disgruntled individuals solely for the purpose of destroying the old established organizations with the hope of building the 'One Big Union,' and had those individuals succeeded all the good work of the past quarter of a century would have been destroyed."

"Our general committees on some of the largest railroads in the country have entered into and signed agreements with the operating officers of such companies that former employees who engaged in the illegal strike mentioned will be returned to service only as new employees and will not be permitted to take seniority rank over loyal members or others employed to fill vacancies created by such illegal action."

Great courage was needed, indeed, to sign this letter, as Mr. Lee did, setting the example to his colleagues, and to disfranchise by one decision several thousand men. It is ancient history now and seems especially stale in the light of immediate events. But it is necessary to place it here, or wherever an attempt is being made to measure the man.

Now what does he wish to do? What is his final aim?

It is admirable to notice the vast changes for the better in wages and working hours for railroad men, and these changes have been brought about in a couple of decades, really a short time as improvements go. Isn't he satisfied with what he and his fellow presidents in the railway men's world have accomplished? Evidently not.

That admirer of William G. Lee who has already been quoted answered for him: "Lee wants to see his men get reasonable wages so that they may live in comfort, free from anxiety, and even save money and buy their little homes. He wants to see them allowed time for relaxation. In a word, his ambition for his men is modest, he only wants them to have the things that are the general aspiration of all Americans."

POINTS THAT STAND OUT IN THE CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF W. G. LEE.

THOUGH born in 1859, his friends say he "hasn't changed a hair in twenty years," and he is far younger in appearance than many a man his junior.

Common sense has dictated his policy from the outset, and the conditions which led him to think that the public at this time would not approve a strike of the associated railroad brotherhoods were judged by this standard.

This year has shown the true courage of the man. With no hesitation apparently he brought himself to cancel the charters of many members of his union for their violation of contracts.

A very real admirer summed up his character thus: "Mr. Lee lives to work for all his men, all the time."

He has no relaxation, no games, reads temperately and avoids fiction. He likes the movies, but acting, dancing and kindred exhibitions leave him cold.

Lee is a big man physically and mentally. He is polite and polished, a good speaker, but he practices inhibition and uses few words, none of them excited.

He has been through all the experiences trainmen are likely to have and he sympathizes with them in their very natural ambitions. From every standpoint he can view their aspirations and visualize their needs.

Lee is an American, and perhaps that says all. It may be added that he is anti-bolshevist, anti-socialist and anti-everything that is subversive in theory.